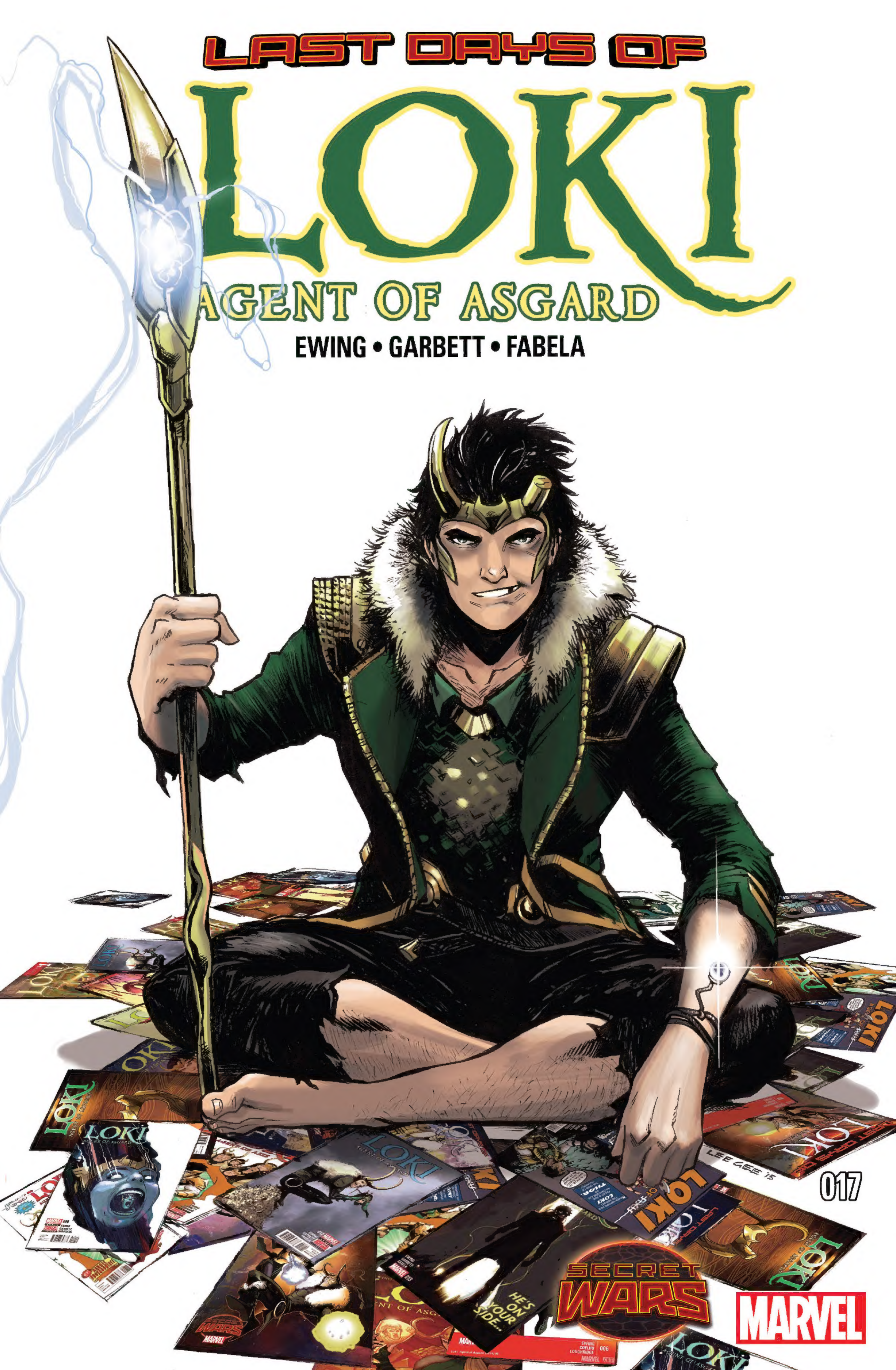
LAST DAYS OF LOKI

AGENT OF ASGARD

EWING • GARBETT • FABELA



017

SECRET WARS

MARVEL

LOKI IS THE GOD OF STORIES.

HIS BEST FRIEND IS VERITY WILLIS, A MORTAL WITH THE POWER TO SEE THROUGH ANY LIE.

HIS WORST ENEMY IS KING LOKI, AN EVIL VERSION OF HIMSELF FROM A DEAD FUTURE.

MOMENTS AGO, THE MULTIVERSE CAME TO AN END, LEAVING LOKI AND VERITY'S DISEMBODIED SPIRIT AS THE ONLY SURVIVORS.

(WELL, ALMOST. HOPE YOU'RE READING *SILVER SURFER.* WE'RE NOT CROSSING OVER OR ANYTHING, BUT YOU REALLY SHOULD ANYWAY. IT'S GREAT.)

(OH, AND KING LOKI WAS LAST SEEN RUNNING AWAY FROM THE COLLAPSING MULTIVERSE. SO KEEP AN EYE OUT.)

LOKI SAT OUT THE FINAL BATTLE OF THE NEW RAGNAROK, INSTEAD USING HIS FULL POWER TO SAVE THE STORIES OF THE GODS FROM OBLIVION.

NOW, HE HAS ATTRACTED THE ATTENTION OF THOSE WHO SIT ABOVE IN SHADOW – THE GODS OF THE GODS.

AND THAT'S ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW.

TIME TO GO.

SMALL GOD.

LOOK UPON US.

AFTER THE END.
IN THE NOTHING.

LOKI.
GOD OF STORIES.

VERITY WILLIS.
LIE-DETECTING GHOST.

...READY FOR THE *HARVEST.*

WE WHO SIT *ABOVE* YOU.

WE WHO *CREATED* THE GREAT CYCLE. WE WHO PRESIDE OVER THY *BIRTH* AND THY *DEATH.*

WE WHO *GREW* YOU, AS *WHEAT* IN A *FIELD...*

THE END HAS COME, SMALL GOD. ALL IS GONE...

...ALL BUT THE STORIES.

THE STORIES WE FEED ON. THAT WE HAVE EVER FED ON, IN RAGNAROK AFTER RAGNAROK.

THY BROTHER HALTED OUR GREAT CYCLE, AND THOUGHT THAT DOOMED US.

BUT AS LONG AS THERE ARE GODS... AS LONG AS THEY WAR, AT THE END OF ALL...WE WILL BE THE FINAL VICTORS.

THE CROW EATS THE CARRION.

THE KING PROFITS FROM THE SOLDIER'S BLOOD.

SO HAS IT EVER BEEN.

YEAH, OKAY.

AND?

YOU HOLD WHAT WE REQUIRE.

THE LEGENDS AND LIVES OF THE GODS. THEIR LIFE FORCES.

WE WOULD FEED.

NOW.

LOKI...

NAH. I'VE GOT THIS.

YOU LOT WANT STORIES?

I'LL TELL YOU A STORY.

ONCE UPON A TIME...

WE'VE NOT GONE BACK IN TIME. RIGHT NOW THERE'S NO "TIME" TO GO BACK INTO.

THINK OF THIS AS... SET DRESSING. SCENE-SETTING.

BRR! CHILLY!

IT'S THREE THOUSAND YEARS AGO-- THE NORDIC BRONZE AGE.

IT'S A HARD LIFE. HARDER THAN USUAL TONIGHT.

THERE'S A STORM AT THE DOOR.

AND IT'S A BIG ONE.

BARRDOUMMM

BARRA KROOM

HA!

LOOK AT THAT!

IMAGINE NOT KNOWING WHAT THAT WAS, EH?

IMAGINE NOT KNOWING WHERE RAIN LIKE THAT CAME FROM, OR WHY, OR IF IT'D EVER STOP.

IMAGINE HOW SCARY THAT'D BE.

FOR YOU AND EVERYONE AROUND YOU-- THE HIGHEST CHIEFTAIN TO THE LITTLEST CHILD.

AND IMAGINE... JUST FOR A SECOND, JUST IMAGINE...

...YOU HAD A MAGIC THAT COULD TAKE THAT FEAR AWAY.

THE GREAT OAK IS ON FIRE.

AND THE SOUND... WHAT MAKES THE SOUND?

BARROUMMM

HEH.

WOULD YOU KNOW MORE, MY CHIEF?

'TIS THE SOUND OF THE THUNDERER'S HAMMER, MY CHIEF. STRIKING THE SKULLS OF GIANT FROST-MEN.

IT RAINS SO FROM THEIR BLOOD SPILLING.

IT SPLITS THE SKY OPEN.

HOW... HOW WAS SUCH A HAMMER FORGED?

THEN COME AROUND THE TELLING-FIRE-- ALL OF YOU.

LISTEN TO THE MAGIC-WORDS.

"ONCE UPON A TIME..."

"LIES.

"LIES TOLD BY FIRELIGHT, TO TAKE AWAY FEAR.

"THE GOD-KING WHO BUILT THE WORLD. THE GOD-QUEEN WHO RULED THE SKY.

"THE WARRIOR-GODDESS, AND HER BROTHER, THE SEER.

"THE HERO, WHOSE GREATEST FLAW WAS THAT HE COULD NOT LOVE. THE THIEF WHO STOLE HIS HEART.

"THE GREAT THUNDERER WITH HIS SKY-HAMMER.

"THE THREE BRAVE KNIGHTS, ONE DASHING, ONE DOUR, ONE LARGE.

"AND THE TRICKSTER, WHO TAKES NO SIDE AND PLAYS NO FAVORITE. THE TELLER OF TALL TALES.

"AND SO MANY OTHERS BESIDES. WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?

"DO YOU KNOW?"

DEEP, DEEP DOWN IN THE VERY HEART OF YOUR HEART. LOOK FOR THE ANSWER *THERE.*

HAVE YOU *GOT* ONE?

CAN YOU ANSWER MY *RIDDLE?*

...

WE...

...IT IS *IRRELEVANT.*

WE...WE *DEMAND...* THAT YOU...

BUT WHERE *DID* THEY COME FROM? ALL THOSE GODS? ALL THOSE *LEGENDS?*

I MEAN, YEAH, *MAYBE* WE PAID A LOT OF *VISITS* TO THOSE EARLY TRIBES. IT'S *POSSIBLE.*

I DON'T REMEMBER, BUT MY MEMORY'S *RUBBISH* THESE DAYS. ASK ANYONE.

SO MAYBE *THAT'S* IT.

OR *MAYBE...*

MAYBE SOME STORIES ARE SO *GOOD...* SO *POWERFUL...* SO *WANTED...*

...THAT THE *UNIVERSE* BELIEVES THEM.

SO GOOD THEY'RE *MAGIC.*

SO GOOD THEY COME *ALIVE.*

JUST IMAGINE! JUST LISTEN TO THEM!

THOSE OLDEST TALES! ECHOING! THROUGH THE AIR, THROUGH THE MIND! THROUGH SPACE AND TIME!

BACK TO THE START OF THINGS!

MIXING WITH THE ALL-THAT-WAS AND SPARKING SOMETHING NEW!

TEN REALMS! TEN RINGING SPHERES ON THE GREAT TREE OF EVERYTHING!

TEN WORLDS OF GODS AND DEMONS AND LIVING MYTHS!

WOULDN'T THAT BE GREAT?

OR MAYBE THAT'S JUST NONSENSE.

WHAT DO YOU THINK, VERITY?

I-- DON'T KNOW. YOU'VE NOT SAID ANYTHING DEFINITE--

YOU'RE STILL MY BEST FRIEND.

ALL RIGHT. ONE THING.

IT'S ALL MAYBES AND MIGHT-BES, THOUGH. "I DUNNO." "I CAN'T REMEMBER." "WHAT IF?"

MAGIC WORDS THAT MAKE ANYTHING POSSIBLE.

I MEAN, A STORY SO BIG AND MAD AND BRILLIANT THAT IT GOES BACK IN TIME AND CHANGES OTHER STORIES?

WHOEVER HEARD OF THAT?

SPEAK... SPEAK NO MORE!

WE COMMAND THEE!

I'M JUST GETTING TO THE GOOD BIT.

SEE...IF THE GODS OF MAN WERE MADE BY MAN...IN TIME OF NEED...

...WHAT ABOUT YOU? GODS TO THE GODS? EH?

WHAT TALES WOULD THE GODS TELL, AROUND THEIR FIRES? WHEN THE FIRE OF RAGNAROK COMES?

WHEN THE LAST STORM IS AT THE DOOR?

WHEN EVERYTHING DIES?

DID YOU CREATE US, YOU-WHO-SIT-ABOVE-IN-SHADOW?

OR DID WE MAKE YOU--

BE!

SILENT!

NEVER!

COME ON! THINK BACK! IS IT TRUE?

FWOOM

CAN YOU REMEMBER A TIME YOU *WEREN'T* FEEDING OFF US? OFF OUR *FEAR*? OFF THE *TALES* WE TOLD?

WELL, I'M THE TELLER NOW. THE *LAST* TELLER.

COME AND *LISTEN*, GODS-OF-THE-GODS.

THE GOD OF STORIES TELLS *YOUR* STORY TONIGHT.

NO--

WHAT'S THAT?

DON'T YOU WANT TO KNOW HOW IT *ENDS*?

WOULD YOU KNOW MORE?

HA.

THEY'RE... GONE...?

BACK WHEREVER THEY CAME FROM.

I THINK I LOST THE *AUDIENCE.*

SO WAS...WAS ALL THAT *TRUE?* WHAT YOU TOLD THEM?

AND *DON'T* SAY--

I DUNNO.

ARRRGH...

SORRY.

I WAS *BLUFFING.* MAYBE I *WAS* RIGHT-- MAYBE *NOT.*

THEY *COULD'VE* BEEN THE REAL THING, EVEN IF THEY DIDN'T REMEMBER. OUR *CREATORS.*

OR MAYBE *BEYONDERS--* TAKING FORMS TO ESCAPE THEIR *DOOM.* NICE *REALISTIC* EXPLANATION FOR THE SCIENCE CROWD...

DOES IT MATTER? I *WON,* THEY *LOST--* WE'VE GOT MORE *IMPORTANT* THINGS TO DO.

LOOK *BEHIND* YOU.

IS...IS THAT...?

KING LOKI.

THE LOKI THAT COULD HAVE BEEN.

...

GO AWAY.

WHAT? WHAT'S THAT MEANT TO BE?

COME ON, "KING LOKI!" IT'S TIME FOR OUR BIG FIGHT!

FOR ALL THE MARBLES!

HA HA.

IT'S NOT FUNNY.

IT IS A BIT, THOUGH.

VERITY...WHAT DO YOU SEE WHEN YOU LOOK AT HIM?

WELL... AN OLD, EVIL YOU. WHAT AM I LOOKING FOR?

THERE'RE NO ILLUSIONS THERE--

YEAH. JUST THE TRUTH.

BUT THERE'S MORE THAN ONE TRUTH.

L-LET GO!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

RRIP

THIS-- THIS IS ME!

THIS IS ME--

I KNOW.

BUT THAT'S YOU, TOO.

SUH-SO WHAT? YOU THINK IT MUH-MATTERS?

I DID EVERYTHING! EVERYTHING THEY SAID! AND THEY WUH-WOULDN'T LET ME BUH-BE ANYTHING NEW!

THEY... THEY JUST WANTED THE OLD LOKI.

SO THAT'S WHAT THEY GOT.

AND YOU. WHAT DID YOU DO THAT WAS SO DIFFERENT? WHAT MAKES YOU BETTER THAN ME?

ALL YOU DID WAS DIE ALL OVER AGAIN--

DID I? MAYBE. A BIT.

BUT THERE'S ALWAYS MORE THAN ONE TRUTH.

That which is called ***ego-death.***

The absence of the self.

Becoming not.

Leaving behind ***attachment.***

Thrones, grudges, power, the old temptations.

Leaving behind ***ignorance.***

The repeating of the old, expecting the new.

Leaving behind ***anger.***

So much anger.

But then... when all that was ***gone...***

YOU FELL TO THE VOID--

JUST LIKE LAST TIME--

I CAME BACK.

AND I'M STILL *ME.* REALLY.

I'M STILL ME.

FINE. *DANDY.* BULLY FOR YOU.

LEAVE ME *ALONE--*

NO, NO, LISTEN. *LISTEN.*

I REMEMBER... I REMEMBER SAYING YOU COULDN'T TRICK *YOURSELF.* OR YOU *SHOULDN'T.*

BUT... WHAT IF YOU *COULD?*

YOU KILL THE EARTH IN A FIT OF BILE. YOUR BROTHER WANTS TO KILL *YOU.* LIFE'S NOT WHAT YOU *WANTED.*

SO YOU GO BACK IN *TIME*--'COS YOU *CAN*--AND YOU THINK YOU KNOW *WHY.* YOU WANT TO BE YOU *SOONER.*

BUT WHEN YOU'RE *HERE*... YOU JUST *SMASH* IT ALL. TEAR DOWN EVERYTHING THAT *MADE* YOU YOU--ALL THE *SUPPORT SYSTEMS--*

--AND HAND OUT *BETTER* ONES. I WOULDN'T HAVE *MET* LOKI IF NOT FOR YOU.

YEAH. REMIND ME TO TELL YOU WHERE THAT *RING* YOU ATE CAME FROM.

FINE. IT WAS A *STUPID* PLAN--

NO. I MEAN...YOU WERE *HORRIBLE.* YOU *HURT* PEOPLE. YOU DIDN'T DO IT *RIGHT.*

BUT I THINK YOUR PLAN *WORKED.*

I...

I JUST WANTED...

I KNOW.

IT'S ALL RIGHT.

IT'S ALL RIGHT.

HE LOOKS HAPPY.

CONTENT, ANYWAY.

WHAT...JUST *HAPPENED?* AND NO "I DUNNO" THIS TIME, PLEASE--

I LET HIM COME *HOME,* THAT'S ALL.

HE WAS THE ME THAT COULD'VE BEEN-- THE *CAUTIONARY TALE.* IT'S NOT RIGHT TO PRETEND THAT'S NOT *IN* ME.

THAT'S...NOT REASSURING. THAT WON'T *AFFECT* YOU, WILL IT? I DON'T KNOW, TURN YOU EVIL OR SOMETHING?

ARE YOU GOING TO *CHANGE* AGAIN?

WE'RE *ALL* GOING TO CHANGE AGAIN. THAT'S JUST *LIFE.*

I CAN'T BE THIS LOKI FOREVER. YOU CAN'T BE THAT *VERITY* FOREVER. FIVE YEARS, TEN YEARS, WE'LL *BOTH* BE DIFFERENT PEOPLE...

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

...THERE'S STILL THAT *GRAVITY.* WHAT PEOPLE *EXPECT.*

BUT...*BIRDS* FEEL GRAVITY, TOO. AND *ACROBATS,* AND *DANCERS.* AND THEY DIVE AND SWOOP AND TUMBLE *ANYWAY.*

LOOP THE LOOP, WALK THE WIRE...

DO *TRICKS.*

NAH. NO MORE EVIL.

MISCHIEF, NOW.

THAT'S STILL GOT *LEGS.*

WHAT'S THAT *SMILE* FOR?

"FIVE YEARS. TEN YEARS."

YOU THINK THERE'S A *FUTURE.*

IT'S *NOT* THE END, IS IT?

I *TOLD* YOU. YOU CAN'T KILL THE *STORIES. LOTS* SURVIVED, AND LOTS *WILL.*

THE *SILVER SURFER'S* SOMEWHERE AROUND HERE--HE DOESN'T NEED *US* PEERING OVER HIS SHOULDER, THOUGH.

AND THERE'S A PATCHWORK PLANET OF *FUN* OFF SOMEWHERE IN ITS OWN LITTLE POCKET--BUT THAT'S *HEAVING* WITH LOKIS ALREADY. *AND* THORS. AND *DOOM.*

AND IF I'M *HONEST*...AND SOMETIMES I *AM*...

...I NEED A *BREAK.*

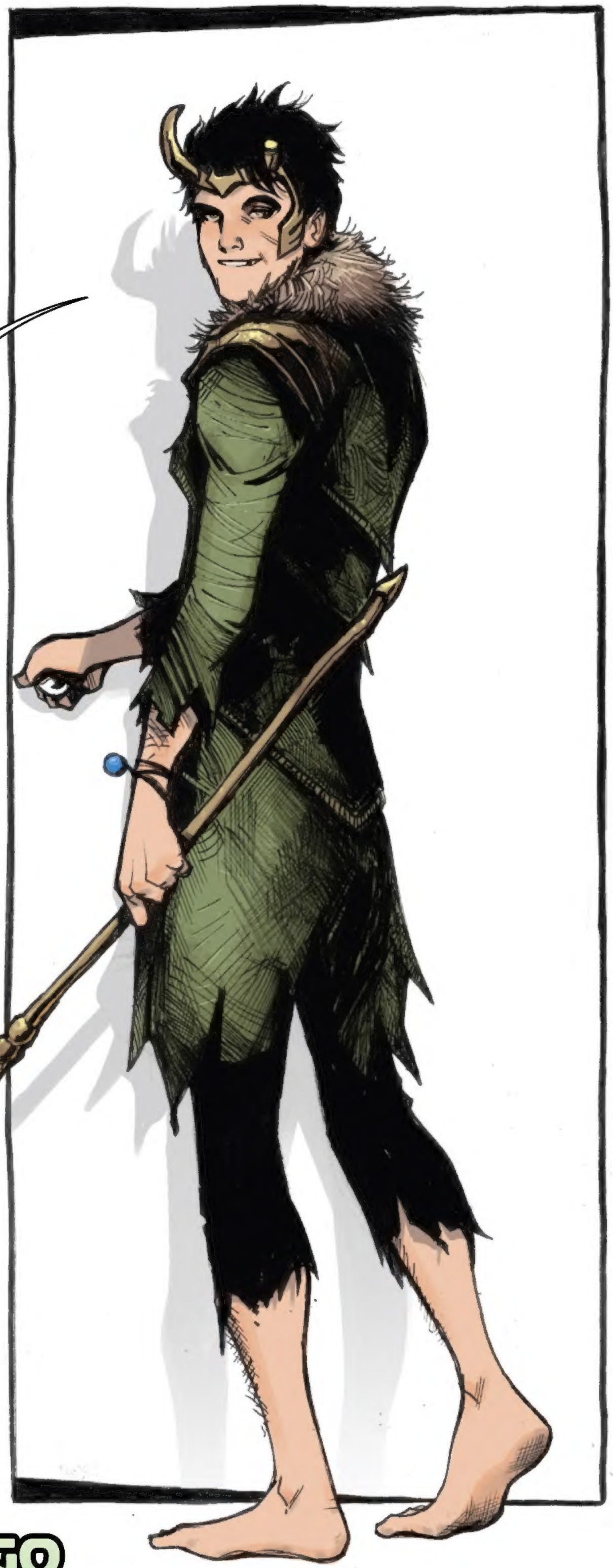
SO... LET'S SKIP AHEAD A BIT.

SEE WHAT COMES *AFTER.*

YOU *COMING,* OR WHAT?

YOU'RE... JOKING...

NEXT:



OUT THE GATE YOU GO AND NEVER STOP

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HERE'S LOKI-ING AT YOU

Send letters to MHEROES@MARVEL.COM. Don't bother to mark "OKAY TO PRINT!"

"It's all right. It's all right."

I wrote that yesterday, and I actually started crying.

Four pages from the end and he finally got me.

LOKI started off as a book about being For Yourself, and I feel like it's managed to end that way, too. Looking back, it's been a series about trying to be better – about finding some way to care for yourself despite everything. I don't know if we really answered that question of how that's done, in the end – but then it's all a hell of a lot easier said than done anyway. Everything's easier for stories.

I hope reading this book was better than not reading it. That's all I've got.

In terms of the writing – it was work I'm incredibly proud of, and work that could have been so much better, and sometimes I did good and sometimes I stumbled and failed and let everyone down. It was all of that. A whole lot of me went into this series and it took a lot out. If I'm honest, I need a break. I'll be glad to let it go.

I really, really hate to let it go.

But it wasn't just the writing, obviously. No comic is.

So – thanks to Lauren Sankovitch, who started all this rolling, and Wil Moss and Jon Moisan, the editorial team supreme. Thanks to Clayton Cowles for providing perfect lettering and never flying to the UK and strangling me, and thanks to Nolan Woodard, Lee Loughridge and Antonio Fabela for the matchless color work. Thanks to Jenny Frison for the gorgeousness of the first five covers. And thank you, Jorge Coelho, for being the perfect fill-in artist – I can't imagine the magic battle in #6 done by anyone else.

Who does that leave?

Lee.

I could talk about seventeen-and-a-half issues – fifteen of this and two-and-a-half of the TENTH REALM mini – done, pencil and ink, without a break under deadline pressures that even Ditko Spidey couldn't have stood the weight of. I could talk about putting up with my crap for month after month. I could talk about the pure clean beauty of his line, his mastery of expression, his storytelling instincts, all of which survived and thrived under the aforementioned Spidey-murdering pressure. But I'll just say this:

Lee is the only artist who could possibly have done this comic. He's a true friend. And we're not done. You'll be hearing more of us as a team sooner or later – it's just a question of when. The day will come.

Meanwhile, Loki's going to change again sooner or later, because that's what comics do to meet the times, and that's okay. That's how it should be. But right now, I think we've left him where he needed to be.

I hope you liked it. If I let you down, I'm sorry.

Thanks for reading.

-Al

Well…wow…

What a ride that was!

I'm so proud to have been a part of this book and so sad that it's come to a close - but if it has to end, then what better time to do it, eh?

I think this last arc has been the most beautiful of all for me, and I love that, despite being set against a backdrop of action-packed epic battles, worlds colliding and everything literally being obliterated, our final confrontation is actually one of gentleness and warmth.

Of acceptance and forgiveness.

Of course, there's still the odd trick or two, naturally. No one changes THAT much.

Speaking of which, we were also so lucky to have been given one of the rarest opportunities in comics these days, the chance to affect genuine change.

Will that change stick? Hopefully, for a while at least. Who needs shoes, right? But this is a character that has change written into his/her DNA, so it's inevitable, and correct, that change will occur somewhere down the line.

So I guess that leaves me to just say a big bunch of heartfelt thank yous!

Thank you to everyone who bought and supported the book and character so passionately and vocally along the way. It was always noticed and appreciated and I had all of you in mind when drawing this.

Thank you to the wonderful team behind LOKI. Marvel in general, but especially C.B. Cebulski for suggesting me in the first place and Lauren Sankovitch for putting the team together. Special thanks to Wil Moss and Jon Moisan, for being so fun, supportive, watchful and enthusiastic throughout. Thanks to lettering maestro Clayton Cowles and to Jenny Frison for those gorgeous covers! To Jorge Coelho for his safe hands and pitch perfect take on issues #6 and #7. Thanks to Nolan Woodard, Lee Loughridge and the wonderful Antonio Fabela for bringing this world to life with their stunning colors.

And last but not least: Al Ewing. The Al-Father. The All-Ewing.

Al and I go back a ways. He wrote the very first gig I had at 2000 AD. A one-page "Future Shock" and even that was whip-smart - but I think his LOKI is a masterpiece. It continually blew me away. Every time I'd get a new script I'd be reading it in stunned surprise at where he'd taken it, at how cleverly he'd laid it out, the emotional impact or wit of a scene, his understanding of the characters and their unique voices. I could tell when he'd had fun with something or when something had caused him genuine pain to get onto the page.

I think Al *is* Loki. A sweet, bearded Loki. Always five steps ahead of the game, sharp as a tack and capable of real magic.

He is also my friend.

So thank you, Al. Let's do this again, soon.

Finally, if I may, I would like to dedicate this book to my wonderful parents: My mom, Margaret, who passed away shortly before I started on LOKI, and my dad, Derrick, who passed away during its run. I know they would both have been very proud to see me fulfill my dream.

-Lee

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ZONE